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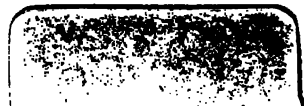


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HISTORICAL SKETCH

—OF THE—

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF CHRIST,

IN PLYMOUTH, MASS.

BY REV. H. W. COFFIN.

DELIVERED BEFORE THE OLD COLONY BAPTIST ASSOCIATION,
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HISTORICAL SKETCH

—OF THE—

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF CHRIST IN PLYMOUTH.

After requisite preliminary meetings. on the 12th of July, 1809, at nine o'clock in the morning, a little company of brethren and sisters, holding Baptist views, was gathered at the house of Stephen Bartlett, anticipating recognition as a Church of Christ after the New Testament pattern. Unworthy and ungracious in their own estimation, they are worthy esteem for the sterling qualities of their convictions and of their Christian lives. One of the twenty-eight was from Middleboro, one from Kingston, one from Carver, and the rest of the seven men and three times seven women belonged to Plymouth. The council convened was composed of the pastor and one delegate from each of the following churches, viz.: First in Middleboro, Third in Boston, Third in Middleboro, First in Kingston, Third in Tiverton, and the records of their proceedings inclose names never to be forgotten in the history of Baptist principles in the Old Colony: Samuels, Nelson, Glover and Abbott, and William Bentley. The group had adopted the sentiments of the Third Baptist Church in Boston as a declaration of their own faith and practice, and the council voted unanimously to give them fellowship as "The First Baptist Church of Christ in Plymouth," and to assist in sustaining the Vine of God's own planting. At the same date, their preacher, Lewis Leonard, a young man of Middleboro, who followed well the training he had had under Isaac Backus, was ordained to the work of the gospel ministry. Thus, more than three-quarters of a century ago, there came into visible existence this Branch of Zion having, today, a history of its own worthy of commemoration, even by famous, sacred Plymouth Rock:

Earnest efforts were made in the very dawning of the present century, by neighboring pastors and laymen, to found such an interest, and to aid them who had come to entertain convictions harmonious with the Baptists, after long years of preparation. The Pilgrims, who settled Plymouth, "had associated with Dutch Baptists and with English Baptist refugees during their ten years' stay in Holland, and their sentiments seem to show the effects of such association." Roger Williams, "the victim of one of the most blind-guided persecutions that has ever raged within the borders of this State," an exile from the Massachusetts Colony, in the first half of the seventeenth century, had enunciated here the doctrine of "the widest liberty of conscience in matters of religion," "the sublime principle," one has written, "from the alembic of his own soul." Henry Dunster, the first President of Harvard College, had stirred the community by denying the right of infants to receive baptism in any form. Charles Chauncy, Harvard's second President, defended here the "close adherence to God's Word in maintaining that the immersion of the entire body is essential to Christian Baptism," Gilbert Tennant and Eleazer Wheelock, who with Bellamy, Pomeroy, Davenport and William Tennant, had borne on the wave of the "Great Awakening," until New England was filled with their views, preached in Plymouth repentance, conversion, the absolute authority of the Scriptures in matters of religious faith and practice, so that many began to seek as they had never studied before, and the legitimate outcome of that research was dissatisfaction with the Standing Church, and a strong desire to see Baptist principles obtain. Backus refers to a gracious revival in January, 1793, prevailing to a greater degree than any since 1742. The pastor of the Pilgrim Church, Rev. Dr. Chandler Robbins, in the Summer of 1794, "baptized one woman by immersion, which was a new thing in that town." This woman, Mrs. Desire Holmes, was afterwards a member of the Baptist Church, and fully did as others fully believed, who were more reluctant so to do. Rev. Ezra Kendall, of Kingston, is referred to, in 1807, as the first regular Baptist minister who preached the gospel in this ancient town. By special request, he took the Word and taught some the way of the Lord more perfectly. In crowded private houses, and once, when there was to be a baptism, in the open air, on a hog'shead, with a red silk handkerchief on his head, he gave the gospel trumpet no uncertain sound, while, it is recorded, an old woman from a window called out in derision: "Lay it down to

them plain, or they won't believe you if you don't!" It appears that some of them did believe, and they that believed were baptized, both men and women. Nelson and Abbott are named as helpers of the springing germs before the formation of the church. These prior influences slowly wrought their God-ordained effects, the former labors told in true results. But what is intermittent produces oftentimes only a transient reaping; permanency of achievement includes permanency of faithful effort. In the Lord's time there was added to the scattered Baptist sisterhood of churches, in South-eastern Massachusetts, a new and loyal member. Organized for the proclamation of the gospel in Christ, set for the defence of the ordinances that were to be perpetuated till time shall be no more, to labor for the salvation of immortal minds, to lead souls into the light of eternal life, she has continued to this day, through waxing and waning power, to witness for the Lord Jesus.

The pastorate of the Rev. Lewis Leonard, who was afterwards a Doctor of Divinity, was a struggle amid formidable odds. To keep alive and aggressive such an interest in the land supposed to be pre-empted by and for the one church, when neither their principles nor their practices were favored or even respected by many in the place, called for wisdom, patience, charity and faith. "Opposition was awakened in many quarters." They contended, they sought, they obtained, and so far was God pleased to favor them that within ten years from the beginning they enrolled more than sixty souls, besides them who had departed from these earthly scenes for experiences unmeasured by wearied mortals. The times are better, the feelings of Christians are more beautiful today than so long ago, when Rev. —, of Plymouth, said to Rev. —, also of Plymouth, "Brother —, what are we going to do with these Baptists? They are turning the town upside down." The calm answer of the good brother is more to be emulated than the question, "Brother —, we had better let them alone; if this work be of men, it will come to nought." And it has never been overthrown. Mr. Leonard left them September 2, 1810, having served his Master with this people, counting his service also before induction to the sacred office, nearly three years. In his labors at Philadelphia, later in life, this brother was permitted to baptize, on profession of her faith in Christ, a sister who had been denied the rite by her relatives while he was pastor at Plymouth.

In those early years, songs and lamentations ascended together on high. Just as God reckoned the days in the genesis of all things

on the earth, even so with them "the evening and the morning were the first day" of their history. They had no house dedicated to His worship, no popular following, not many wise, not many mighty, as men count might and wisdom. Christianity was crowned with tongues of fire in "all the house" where the apostles were sitting on the day of Pentecost. These disciples resorted to the lowly cellar kitchen on the corner of Summer Street and Ring's Lane, where they congregated until they could repair elsewhere. They were feeble, but strong; — the paradox of discipleship, — for their hope was from the Great Head of the Church. The man of unction was near at hand. Thomas Conant, then twenty-five years old, was teaching a Winter school in Duxbury, and preaching as the way was found so to do. During the Winter, 1810 and 1811, he used to walk from his school to Plymouth every Saturday afternoon, preach in some private house in the evening, on the Sabbath in the "cellar kitchen," and at some station in the north part of the town on his way home at night. Before he discontinued these regular visits, the church hired and entered Burbank's Hall on Middle Street, for their seasons of public devotions. From 1811 to 1820 hope and fear swayed in turn their hearts in the conflict. Neighboring pastors and others volunteered assistance in maintaining preaching and administering the ordinances. Sad cases of discipline occurred. Nevertheless, the church continued to grow. The Rev. Adoniram Judson, having become a convinced and avowed Baptist, who was baptized by Dr. Thomas Baldwin, then of Boston, now of Paradise, entered into an agreement, December 3, 1818, "to take the care of the church as a minister of the gospel, as long as it should be thought best on both sides." He who once so greatly feared the advent of the Baptists in the old town, now heartily, and with great personal sacrifice, ministered to them in holy things, and contended for the faith and order with heroic consecration. The remark may not be deemed irrelevant, since error has obtained in some minds concerning individual histories in this family, that not alone the father of the missionary, but he and his family and his sister Abigail have manifested a deep interest in this branch. The last named, who passed into rest from our midst, January 25, 1884, nearly ninety-three years old, although at her decease a member of the Baptist Church in Woburn, Mass., was wont to send her regular offerings for the support of the Lord's cause among us.

July 28, 1820, a call was extended to be accepted, November 1, by Rev. Stephen S. Nelson, of Attleboro, as their pastor. His

salary was "three hundred dollars, the expense of his moving, and all the loose money." They raised money "by average or equality among the male members" in weekly offerings and monthly settlements, and, judging by the records, the "tythingman" held no sinecure position in the faithful performance of the duties of his office. It is very gratifying to read about their labors, miles away from the centre of the town, after the exemplary custom of the times, and the baptism of willing candidates in Half-Way Ponds in December of this year. Their zeal was worthy companionship with illustrious Baptist precedent. History repeated itself, and they went on their way "rejoicing." During the years of Elder Nelson's pastorate, greater order succeeded attempts at system until the church was more thoroughly furnished for her important work. John Allen and John Hall, good men and spiritually minded, were chosen as deacons in 1821. Praise songs for the help of the worshippers in the public meetings were attended to with a new interest. Committees on music, among the names of whose memberships we often detect that of Timothy Berry, were appointed. Finances were put on a more responsible basis. The records of the Church were arranged for preservation. Discipline was looked to for the weal of body and members. A square front was maintained against such insidious enemies of godliness as dancing and intemperance. Regular attendance at the church covenant meetings was expected and required of all who could be present. Indeed, so well was she recognized in the denomination in the State, that the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society appropriated to her use and support, seventy-five dollars. Eventful such years always, as an interest assumes habits, develops proportions, shows the measure of excellency to be. But God was with them and in His presence is wisdom.

Remember, they had not yet a meeting house. They suffered what any church must suffer without an edifice for the special work and worship of Christ among men. More than a decade of years passed from the date of their organization before they rose up to build; nor were they able so to do any sooner than 1821. With a resolution commensurate with the great necessity of the hour, they voted finally "to move off the corn house" from the land they had secured, to proceed to "the building of our meeting house, and to spare no reasonable time, labor, trouble, or cost to finish it as soon as possible." This they determined, at the same time pledging their beloved pastor a more liberal support. Then they reared that

former house, now they have this latter building. For sixty years the willing sacrifices of this people have been nor small, nor few, to rear these structures, keep them in repair, and release them from financial encumbrances. In prayer, in faith, in praise, they have dedicated the sanctuaries unto God. Expressions of ardent thanks are spread on the pages of the church's records for the substantial aid rendered by ladies and gentlemen outside their own flock in finishing and furnishing the houses.

Wednesday, November 6, 1822, at half past two o'clock, P. M., the completed building was dedicated and the pastor installed. Among the names of the members of the council then and there assembled are to be found these: Thomas Baldwin and Daniel Sharp, John Peak and Isaac Kimball, Ebenezer Briggs and Joseph Torrey, Thomas Conant and Samuel Glover. Dr. Sharp preached the installation, and Dr. Baldwin, at night, the dedication, sermon. Those walls must have sent back some of the grandest utterances ever delivered in that room. They were housed, and no longer occupying a dance hall, their name went forth into the churches, "grasshoppers before giants" though they may have seemed in their own sight, yet the Lord took them up in His potential defense and prosperity, and Zion revealed the heavenly beauty of an indwelling Christ. In 1822 occurred the ordination of Clark Cornish, one of their promising young men, to the gospel ministry. At least count, four of their members have been inducted to the sacred office in these years, and two more, that once were of their number, are now preparing for their loved Master's service. In 1823 we detect the great secret of their power as the people of the living God, they continue to draw on Him for mercies in prevailing prayer. Special seasons, participated in by Christians from without their own fold also, brought refreshing to the weary inheritance. But Pisgah is not Zion's continuing place. The church is in the world. We review with deep regret at that time the rupture between church and society, and the regret must be as keen for the existence of a society in connection with a Baptist Church as for the encroachment of the former on the latter's religious prerogative. Opinions clashed, work was hindered, the church tumbled in a stormy sea for a season. Elder Nelson retired from the place, interests vital trembled. Let us hail that nearing future when Baptist churches will be legally incorporated to attend to their own affairs, both religious and secular, or be so arranged that a society will no longer be necessary.

In pastoral succession next came Rev. Benjamin C. Grafton, of West Cambridge, June 17, 1823. The church numbered about ninety members, was necessitous, was pleading with Jehovah for a gracious outpoural of revival power. One aged woman still lingers here whose heart glows with lively gratitude when referring to Father Grafton's preaching, sent of God to souls. That self-same year this Association held its first reported meeting with the Plymouth Church, a favor since conferred seven times. There were ten churches then, and fourteen last year: twelve hundred and three members then, and fifteen hundred and ninety-nine in 1884. Of that early gathering it is recorded: "We believe there was joy in Heaven over repenting sinners among us." They continued in prayer, and as a people wrestled to defend the pure doctrines of the gospel to a lost world, for in those days strange and deadening opinions about universal salvation, against the teachings of the Book, began to be announced in the place. Such sentimental, irresponsible clearances of the immortal soul from the verdict of man's conscience and the voice of God's Word is well pleasing to some, who most desire present undisturbed human nature. They believed in God, and trusted in His hands the truth as it is in Jesus, when they could not trace the methods of its progress. Items of special interest are: the going of the pastor and one delegate to sit in council with them who were laboring to organize a church in Falmouth, Mass.; the effort made to introduce *The Christian Watchman* more largely among the people and to secure its regular visits to the pastor as a help in his great work; prevailing prayer; nearness of heart to heart in the blessed cause as error lifted up her voice in the streets; the folding of His dear sheep, while the Divine tongue spake. "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Elder Grafton left in 1829, and the Revs. Curtis and Seagraves supplied the pulpit until the opening of 1830; the church "happily united, though they complain that religion is low."

With the new year came to their rescue, in the Lord, one of whom it has often been said, "he tasted the powers of the world to come." In "The Autobiography of Rev. Thomas Conant," it is printed: "I found the church in P. in a very low and discouraged state. They were in debt in several particulars, and thus their energies were in a measure crippled. During the nearly five years I preached there, the church greatly increased in wealth and influence, and nearly doubled in numbers. This season of refreshing from the

presence of the Lord was one of the most extensive ever enjoyed in P. It was shared in by all the evangelical churches in the place. It was a time of the Spirit's power, and many were the subjects of its new creating influence. Forty-four were added to the Baptist Church in one year; twenty-five of these were heads of families. New life was infused into all their interests, both temporal and spiritual." Father Conant was asked at the time if he thought so many new converts would "hold out?" His reply sounds like his sayings: "Do you think all the blossoms on yonder apple tree will come to fruit?" Through evil as well as good report, the majority of those converts stood by Zion. Some have entered in to be forever with Jesus at home, others are near, very near the Beatific Vision, a few are spared to labor and to wait with younger generations. Many of those converts passed through the deepest throes to salvation. They that came to mock went away to magnify the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The weary inheritance lifted up her head refreshed. Among the saved was a member of the Board of Selectmen, the Representative of the town in the Legislature, and a school-teacher. Father Conant left this people in the last of November, 1834, a proven workman that needed not to be ashamed, to labor as a missionary in the O. C. B. Association.

Heeding urgent invitations, Rev. Elisha Cushman became their pastor in 1835, and Rev. Horatio N. Loring from 1838 to 1840. It was a period of trial. Discipline had to be administered, intemperance caused stringent treatment and stalwart opposition. They toiled and prayed and hoped, "believing that He who had purchased His church would not altogether forsake her languishing spirit." During Brother Cushman's pastorate anthems were introduced into the services, under the leadership of William Atwood, 2d, who served as chorister for full forty years. They used then the base-viol. From first to last, players of instruments, or helpers in the singing, have received little and often no compensation for their willing service. The name of Rev. Mr. Smith, of Boston, appears in the records at the first of 1840; doubtless, he preached a while for them only as supply, because in July of the same year Rev. Joseph M. Driver, of Malden, came to them as shepherd in the name of Jesus. Better days were ushered in at once. God was there in effectual working. "Thirty professed hope in the Redeemer." One hundred and thirty-four members were reported. This and that man and woman was then and there born again, who has been a lamp that burned and shone in the service of the Lord. Lewis

Holmes, a licentiate from this church, was ordained at Edgartown in June, 1841. Evangelist Carleton labored with great and good results, both in Brother Driver's and his successor's pastorate. In 1842, Brother Driver was succeeded by Rev. Ira Person. "The attendant trouble and alienations" incident to a change of pastorate were experienced, but soon were over, and a shower of heavenly rain descended. Forty-four baptisms in 1843, more than one-third of all reported at the Association that year. Preparation of the human heart by Jehovah to do His will, eager and dependent efforts to promote His kingdom, married the divine and mortal with such blessed results. They "had frequent opportunities of repairing to their Baptistry, the old Atlantic Ocean." During this year, "The New Hampshire Confession of Faith" was adopted. The "Communion Question," or better, the Baptismal Question, came up and subsided again at that date. In 1844, a pew was bequeathed to the church, and, save one other gift of one hundred dollars, years later, there is no record of such remembrance in the wills of the departed. But the struggle for existence settled, we may confidently expect the historian of the future to chronicle many such endowments for the gospel under Baptist auspices. One hundred and sixty members were included when Brother Person resigned, to take up his membership with the Third Baptist Church in Lowell, Mass. October 12, 1845, her ninth pastor, Rev. Adiel Harvey, of Westboro, entered upon his service with the church, to complete the longest pastorate in her history, in 1855, and to bless with his genial, gentlemanly, Christian presence the community whose servant he later was as Superintendent of the Public Schools. At the service of installation, Rev. Dr. Rollin Heber Neale preached the sermon. In 1846, Daniel W. Faunce, now Rev. D. W. Faunce, of Washington, D. C., was cordially recommended to use his gifts in the glorious gospel of the blessed God; in 1850 he was licensed to preach; in 1853 he removed his special church relations to Somerville, Mass. "Winchell's Watts" gave place to "The Psalmist," in 1846, "The Psalmist" to "The Baptist Hymnal," in 1885; excepting Sabbath School, or Social Service books, these hymnals are the three used by the church. January, 1850, a delegation was sent to consider the formation of a church at North Bridgewater, the old interest that lasted only eighteen years. The church at Plymouth labored at that time with her members who had fallen out by the way. Poor human nature has often stumbled and fallen. But how loving their words, "fraternal

affection more thoroughly strengthened." During 1851 they repaired the sanctuary at an expense of one thousand dollars, "making it more comfortable and attractive." The cloud of revival appeared and was withdrawn. "They hoped that a revival of religion would supercede the necessity for discipline, and set things right." Why it was not so, must be awaited till the Judgment. They loved "the doctrines, precepts and ordinances of the gospel." One of their leading workers wrote, "We have one special encouragement; we are working for God, with this encouragement we know no discouragement." Noble sentiment! God honored such faith by opening the windows of heaven. Twenty-two recruits joined their ranks, and they turned their hope-lit faces again to the fray. Large congregations, well attended prayer meetings, new Bible students and Bible students renewed, were some of the real results of the movement. In 1855 Brother Harvey severed his relations as pastor and remained with this people until 1859.

The pulpit was supplied until Rev. B. A. Edwards, of Newtonville, came among them in 1856. God greatly blessed him in leading his flock. They found good pasturage, they drank of pure waters. They clung to the truth as it is in Jesus, and the truth clave the way for their possession of rich harvests in the fields beyond. "A good vestry," "several interesting cases of conversion," reveal the true state of the church in temporal and spiritual concerns at that time. In connection with this period, we note the selection of Peleg Faunce and Adoniram Whiting as deacons, 1857, the elderly brethren grown old in service and much beloved. These estimable brethren, held in lasting, loving remembrance, were succeeded in 1878 by George Fuller and Ivory Blackmer, who were unanimously chosen to the office. Six deacons have served the church and their God in this important New Testament appointment. In 1860 we note that Ellis Benson was chosen as janitor, a position by no means unimportant in the church's welfare, and holds the same after so long a stewardship. Brother Edwards joined the church at Holliston, Mass., having retired from this field September 9, 1860, "followed by prayers and best wishes of the church." He was the preacher of the semi-centennial discourse on the history of this vine, and to the results of his research are to be referred some of the conclusions and facts in the earlier parts of this sketch.

"God hath his purposes of grace, ways that we cannot tell."

1861 was an eventful year. They had and held an house solemnly dedicated to God's worship. Rev. C. C. Williams became their pastor. Hope abounded to the skies. August 24th, eleven o'clock at night, the alarm started people from their slumbers, for the Baptist Meeting House on Baptist Hill was burning. It was a total loss, not a dollar of insurance on the building, no funds with which to rebuild the sanctuary unto the Lord. How would they, as through the night they watched, have stopped the raging flames, but even so hallowed a structure must perish, in God's great plan.

And with the kindly light—'twas Sabbath morn—
 They gathered round in sadness there to view
 The smold'ring ashes—all 'twas left at dawn—
 Of what they'd nobly sacrificed to do.

Then Mem'ry's pictures came, through gath'ring tears,
 (As though a pall had curtained Hope's sweet face,)
 Of all the careful gleanings of the years,
 And there seemed left to them no shining trace.

But as the hour for worship sweet drew near,
 They comfort sought and solace, not in vain,
 For flock and leader gave to God their fear,
 And Christian Love drew round them her strong chain.

M. M. C.

Accepting the generous invitation of the Congregationalists, and thankfully acknowledging the favor also extended by the Universalists, they repaired to the union service with the people of the Pilgrimage Church, the Baptist pastor preaching the sermon. For thirty-eight years the former structure had served well its purpose, but wisdom for the times was not slow to decide on some better location and more appropriate edifice for the present age. Davis and Brown's Hall, as well as "The Old Bradford Tavern," served them in good stead for preaching or prayer meetings. They were houseless, but the Christian Church is never homeless. Brother Williams was followed by Rev. R. A. Patterson in 1862. His appearance to them was as "the coming of Titus" to Paul. God wrought in old-time power. The services of Evangelist Earle were largely blessed. Thirty-two were added to the church. The present admirable site, on the oldest street in New England, was secured for a new building. Sacrifices of the largest kind, dictated by willing minds and loyal hearts, were the order of the day. Some even went into personal indebtedness for the sake of the cause. By tens, by hundreds, and, in one instance, by thousands, they laid down their offerings to Christ, and up rose the meeting house. Built in the costly period of the late Civil War, they intended it to be worthy the location and worthy the denomination, when it should be

presented unto God. During 1863, Rev. Edward Humphrey came after Brother Patterson in pastoral service. For want of means no progress was made on the building this year. They were obliged to supplement the utmost extent of their own resources by substantial aid from abroad. In 1864, still at their task, hoping for achievement, they "return heartfelt thanks to those who have helped and are helping them on in the work." A little later, 1865, they write: "We cannot now repress, and will not attempt to conceal, our gladness; our years of affliction serve to enhance our present joy," for they had entered the vestry of the now occupied, commodious house of worship. The dedicatory sermon was preached by Brother Humphrey, at a service held May 29, 1867, when the whole building was ready for occupancy.

Deacon John Allen, great in years and grand in Christian integrity, who had seen generations come and go, who had worshipped in both houses, and was conversant with all the way God had led the church from their beginning in 1809; a John indeed, to all the earlier disciples,—as they crossed the threshold of the new sanctuary, Deacon John Allen crossed the borders to eternal day; ninety-two years on earth, forever with his Master there. His mortal remains were borne to their last resting place from the new vestry. When the baptistry in the new house was ready for use, the first one to be buried in its waters was Samuel Alexander, eighty-seven years of age, who had waited four years for the opportunity to follow his Lord, and who joyfully put on Christ by baptism.

We note the withdrawal of Brother Humphrey in 1867, bearing with him the hearty thanks of the people for his arduous labors in raising money for the struggling interest, and the advent of a new pastor, Rev. Ruel B. Moody, of Ashland, in 1868. The church of one hundred and thirty-nine members over which he was duly installed, Rev. Dr. Justin D. Fulton preaching the sermon, soon grew to one hundred and fifty. The Sabbath School flourished with a new life and unwonted energies, assuming a large place of usefulness in the work. During 1871 the old membership list was revised, and several names were erased. Having once learned to give, they continued to give, and large amounts of money were reported year by year from this church. Indeed, her history proves that in this one department of Christian stewardship, at least, she is not to be reckoned delinquent. Brother Moody closed his labors with this branch in 1872, attested by resolutions of gratitude and an assurance of their abiding interest in him. Students and others were

acceptable supplies in preaching for them until they secured another leader of the forces. One thing is remarkable in these years of history, how they have worked when even without a pastor, taking turns in the leadership of the social meetings, and naturally and devotedly performing duties by personal appointment. It is a commendable trait of church life. Revs. Jeremiah M. Mace and Thomas Atwood, who had faithfully labored for their Lord, the one so successfully in the Nation's Capital and the other away at the "Golden Gate," united with this church in 1873 and 1874 respectively. But now they rest from all their labors here, their names perpetuate fragrant memories, while with the worthies, divested of all signs of weariness and decrepitude, they reign with the resplendent, youthful Christ.

Rev. C. H. Remington preached for a season, and the next regular pastor to Brother Moody was Rev. B. P. Byram, who was settled in 1874. Seedtime and harvest met, in the economy of grace, during this pastorate. 1876 and 1877 were hard financial years for the country. The Plymouth Church felt the depression, and had a struggle to meet even running expenses, while a debt gathered over the society and ominous thunderings shook their hearts. The inevitable silver lining was soon spread over the cloud, and God came into their very midst. Beginning in January, 1877, with the week of prayer, and continuing more than three months, special revival services were held. This church and other churches shared in the goodly sheaves; it was seen there yet was a God in Israel. Brother Byram resigned his charge, to take effect September 1, 1877, and entered upon the work at Sheldonville, Mass., followed by the "best wishes and earnest prayers of the people with whom he had labored three years, during which time he had won the respect and confidence of the community."

Grateful was the expression of appreciation of the mother church to one of her sons, Rev. Lewis Holmes, who had returned to Plymouth, his native place, with impaired health, after years of service in other fields. He aided in sustaining the cause, he sought to liberate the debt-involved interest from many perplexities in her career. He performed many labors for the pastorless church, resting them all in the Lord's name, while in the records it is penned, "May the Lord reward him." The necessary repairs on the house of worship, amounting to eight hundred dollars, was a matter to them of serious consideration, but they went forward to put the sanctuary in proper order. Their united efforts for a while

were directed to the liquidation of their church debt, and they continued to be supplied in pulpit ministrations by ordained ministers and students from Newton Theological Seminary. In 1879 they report the adoption of "the free seat system" and "weekly offerings," by which system they raised and do raise more money than by any other method. In earlier years the church treasurers received a very small compensation for their services; but for many years past, even to the treasurership of Brethren Hubbard, Bradford, Nelson and Benson, labors of love for the cause of Christ have been the reward. During the Summer of this year, Brother W. A. Spinney acceptably labored with the people, and together they enjoyed seasons of spiritual profit. But they felt the need of a pastor, for even the best of preachers cannot meet all the requirements of a church, nor can the best of pastors be all that is requisite in the leadership. God has ordained preachers and God has appointed pastors; every church must have both in one for its highest usefulness. They were much in prayer for the way to open. Like the old-time church, so the modern church was pleading for that Divine interposition of agencies that makes rough places plain.

February 1, 1880, H. W. Coffin, of Merrimac, Mass., the incumbent of the pastoral office of this church at the present time, entered the labors to which both the Lord and the people seemed to call him. Rev. Dr. George W. Bosworth preached the installation sermon. The years since give glory to God. Many lost souls have been won to Christ. The people have had a mind to work. Sixty have been added to the church. The membership in 1883 reached its largest number in all its history, one hundred and eighty. Finances have been undertaken and are today healthy, if due care and attention be given to them. Work nigh and work far away has quickened their zeal. The house of worship has undergone a complete renovation. While no extensive revival of religion has gladdened hearts, one by one has come to that life that knows no death, to that light that knows no darkness.

And so readeth this fleeting history. Sixteen pastors, six deacons, six hundred members from that small beginning. Three-quarters of a century, one year and more is gone, but from that primitive hour to this developed success, the Providence of God spans the history like an arch of perpetual promise. It seems a long time to many of us, but one yet lingers, the oldest in membership, Brother Charles Nelson, who entered this fellowship over sixty-five years ago. All of this time is transmuted to a speaking present, as we read these

clerks' records, — Edwin Paulding, Elisha Nelson, Drs. Benjamin and Levi Hubbard, E. Cushing Turner, Caleb Ryder and Timothy Berry, — bringing us to the records of them whose hands have long rested in the grave. Church history, with all its vicissitudes, with all its promises and all its disappointments, with all its joys and all its sorrows, with all its rectitudes and all its fragrances, with all its grace and, finally, with all its glory, is but the "Commentary on the Great Commission," as Christianity belts the globe with light. God help us to profit by it.

In behalf of the Church,

and for the good of all the churches,

H. W. COFFIN.

PLYMOUTH, Mass., October 11, 1885.

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